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FOR NEA/ARP FRANCESCHI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT INACTIVE BUT UPCOMING SPECIAL SESSION  
MAY BE EXCITING

REF: A. SANAA 1634  
[1](#)B. SANAA 2153  
[1](#)C. SANAA 1859

Classified By: CDA Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (U) The current session of Parliament accomplished almost nothing before its holiday recess. The most exciting moment was when opposition members walked out in protest of draft amendments to the country's electoral law. An expected joint session in January to discuss the President's reform initiative promises to be more exciting. While not unexpected, the parliament's lack of action is disappointing, particularly with regard to its failure move forward on much-needed customs and counterterrorism laws. End Summary.

WHAT DIDN'T HAPPEN

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[1](#)2. (C) The ROYG parliament went into recess in honor of the Hajj season on November 27. The recess marked the end of the first half of a Parliament session (which began on October 20) that has, thus far, been more distinguished by what it has not accomplished than what it has. Islah party Member of Parliament Shawqi al-Qadi described the session to an embassy employee on December 17 as having been characterized by "absenteeism" and "GPC domination" of the voting. Nabil Basha, a parliamentarian from the ruling General People's Congress (GPC), told poloff on December 10 that no substantive legislation has been passed. This sentiment was echoed by opposition Islah party Assistant Secretary General Dr. Mohammed Al-Sadi, who told poloff on December 15 that the majority of the current session had focused on reports from various ROYG entities. In spite of the amount of time these reports took up, Al-Sadi was unable to cite any items from any of the reports that were of particular interest. Notably absent from the parliament's proceedings was any action on the controversial draft Unity Law (ref a). Equally absent was any action on a much-needed customs law or a counterterrorism law.

WHAT DID HAPPEN

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[1](#)3. (C) In spite of the lack of concrete accomplishments, the session was not without incident. The most exciting moment came shortly before the recess when, on November 26, the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) walked out over controversial draft amendments to the electoral law that would change the way in which the Supreme Council for Elections and Referenda (SCER) members are selected (ref b). The draft amendments to articles 19, 21, and 22 of the Electoral Law, which were submitted by the cabinet on

November 25, were referred to committee.

¶4. (C) The only other moment of controversy, according to Murad Zafir, Senior Program Director for the National Democratic Institute in Yemen, came during debate over the budget, particularly with regard to a request from the Cabinet for a 1.5 billion dollar supplement to the current year's spending that JMP and independent parliamentarians refused to support. It was passed on November 13 by the GPC majority. On a positive note, on November 6, a terrorism finance law was introduced. It, unfortunately, has yet to be brought to an open debate.

WHAT'S NEXT?

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¶5. (C) Parliament is scheduled to resume on February 1. According to Basha, however, President Saleh will convene a special joint session in January to discuss his proposed amendments to the Constitution (ref c). These amendments, currently being drafted by a GPC committee led by former PM Abdulqader Bajammel, were announced by the President in October. They are ostensibly aimed at decentralizing power, but many observers believe that the amendments include changes to the term lengths of the President and Members of Parliament and a plan to move to "an entirely presidential system." This special joint session in January promises to be contentious as the opposition JMP stands ready to resist the initiative. Al-Sadi told poloff on December 15 that the opposition favors a parliamentary system of government and sees the President's initiative as an attempt to concentrate more power in his hands. Al-Sadi also noted that he and other members of Islah suspect that the provision changing the length of presidential terms of office is intended to allow Saleh to run for two more terms as opposed to stepping

down. (Note: This is a common speculation among those who watch Yemeni politics. End Note.)

COMMENT

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¶6. (C) The inactivity of this parliament, while not unexpected, is disappointing. Yemen is in need of new well-crafted laws in a number of areas. A customs law is one of many things the ROYG will need if it is to reach its goal of WTO accession. Its lack of strong and comprehensive counterterrorism laws hinders CT cooperation. The parliament's failure to act on these issues is symptomatic of a weak legislature.

BRYAN